



Gulf Security and Iraq's Uncertain Future

Highway of Doom.

U.S. Navy

By P H E B E M A R R

Iraq's uncertain future hangs like a pall over the Persian Gulf. Five years after sanctions were imposed, followed closely by a punishing war, the regime in Baghdad still clings to power. Moreover, despite Saddam Hussein's recent enforced cooperation with the United Nations, he has not complied with all relevant U.N. cease-fire resolutions. What lies ahead for Iraq? Is the current regime likely to survive? What difference does its survival or demise make to Gulf security? What challenges face the United States and the international community in dealing with Iraq in the near term as well as in the more distant future?

As part of the Gulf War cease-fire, the United Nations, under American leadership, placed unprecedented constraints on Iraq. They have been imposed using various instruments, sanctioned by Security Council resolutions, and implemented by U.S. and allied forces. They include:

- an austere sanctions regime which has deprived Iraq of oil revenues and all imports not related to sustenance and medical necessities

- a program to destroy Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as well as intrusive monitoring to prevent future WMD production

- no fly zones in the north and south to limit Iraq's capacity for repressing its population

- rectification of Iraq's border with Kuwait and a monitored demilitarized border zone.

Saddam in a Box

These measures are designed to compel Iraq's compliance with a series of U.N. resolutions put in effect as part of the cease fire. However, they also serve to contain Baghdad's potential for aggression by limiting its military capacity and encouraging a change of regime.

Sanctions. The most important element of these constraints is sanctions. The oil embargo has reduced Iraq's foreign exchange income from a prewar \$12–15 billion to a current \$1 billion. Sanctions also restrict all imports except food and medical items. Although Iraq produces some of its own food and operates light to medium industry, sanctions have created shortages of equipment and

spare parts. Industrial production is half its prewar level and inflation is rampant. The dinar, valued at about \$3 before the war, now fluctuates at 800–1,000 dinars to the dollar and has recently reached 2,250. One indication of Iraq's declining economy is per capita income, currently reduced to a level of the late 1960s, before the rise in oil prices.

Weapons of Mass Destruction. Another critical constraint has been the inspection regime to locate, destroy, and bar production of WMD and ballistic missiles with a range over 150 kilometers. To this end, a U.N. monitoring system is being installed to assure that such systems are not reconstituted. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) are charged with enforcing the regime. Thus far they have destroyed chemical warfare facilities, missiles and missile production factories, and other plants devoted to nuclear weapons production, although recent revelations may require reopening inspection of some WMD categories previously considered "closed." Biological weapons have not

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 1995		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-1995 to 00-00-1995	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Gulf Security and Iraq's Uncertain Future				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 260 Fifth Avenue SW Bg 64 Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 5	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

been fully identified and eliminated. Thousands of documents must be analyzed and it must be determined whether any biological feed stock remains. Even if inspections result in the destruction of stocks and production facilities, without continuous intrusive monitoring Iraq could restart some programs, especially biological and chemical, since it possesses a large pool of scientists and technocrats with the expertise.

No Fly Zones. Another element of the containment policy is no fly zones. In the north of Iraq, the United States, Britain, and France conduct Provide Comfort, part of which comprises an air operation that prohibits Iraqi flights north of the 36th parallel. On the ground, a secure zone has been established to provide a safe haven for Kurds who fled from control by the central government after their failed rebellion in 1991. A military coordination committee comprised of American, British, French, and Turkish military representatives patrols the area and supervises the safety of the Kurds. In late 1991, Iraq withdrew its troops from much of the north to a perimeter from the Syrian to the Iranian borders. It no longer exercises sovereignty in this exclusion zone.

In 1992, a no fly zone was instituted south of the 32nd parallel to enable the coalition to monitor Iraqi noncompliance with U.N. prohibitions on repression of the Shia population. The no-fly zone also prevents the regime from using aircraft to support counterinsurgency operations. But Saddam did not withdraw his forces, and remains in control on the ground. After Iraq mobilized troops on the Kuwait border in October 1994, the United Nations passed resolution 949 which precludes Iraq from strengthening its forces in the south. According to Anglo-American interpretation, this means that units now north of the 32nd parallel, including Republican Guard units, may not move south of it. As a result, Iraqi sovereignty over the

south has been weakened but not eliminated. In addition, Operation Southern Watch provides further protection to Kuwait by giving the United States and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) better warning should Saddam contemplate another attack.

Kuwait-Iraq Border. A U.N. commission has aligned and demarcated the Kuwait-Iraq border, with a 10-kilometer demilitarized zone on the Iraqi side and a 5-kilometer zone on the Kuwaiti side, monitored by the U.N. Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM).

the United States may face difficult decisions on sanctions

These formidable restrictions have succeeded in compelling compliance with some, though not all, WMD provisions and recognition of the newly drawn border with Kuwait. Saddam has lost sovereignty over portions of Iraq; he has little income to revitalize his forces; international monitors constrain resuscitation of his WMD program; and sanctions are sapping the economy and ability of the regime to reward its power base.

Looking ahead the question is not the efficacy of these instruments to compel compliance with resolutions or to contain aggression, but rather how long they can last, whether they can bring about a change in the regime, and what might happen if they are lifted or weakened.

At some future point, the United States may face difficult decisions on the sanctions if, however gradually and reluctantly, Saddam Hussein has been compelled to adhere to key WMD resolutions. Ultimately only one of two outcomes is possible in Iraq, either loosening sanctions with the current regime or a change of leadership. It is on long-term scenarios that analysts are now beginning to focus.

A Post-Saddam Regime

As time passes the potential for a leadership change slowly improves, but it is by no means certain. Sanctions, and more critically the growing sense in

Baghdad that Washington will continue to back constraints on the regime, weaken Saddam's hold on power. Assessments of his longevity were shortened with the defections in August 1995 of several members of his immediate family. Also relevant is Baghdad's isolation, sagging morale among the military, and growing opposition. All this evidence suggests a gradual narrowing of the regime's support base.

In the south the Shia are profoundly disaffected. Many dissidents remain in the marsh area while others

stage cross-border raids from Iran. Saddam's control, despite massive draining of the marshes to remove a refuge for these dissidents, remains weak in the area.

In the north the government has lost control of much of the Kurdish area. In the exclusion zone, two Kurdish parties and their militias are in charge, while an umbrella opposition group, the Iraq National Congress, operates with impunity. Unfortunately, early experience of Kurdish self-government has collapsed in party infighting, spoiling chances for a cohesive opposition movement. While the opposition in the north is unable to unseat the regime, it runs extensive information and intelligence operations against the government and acts as a base for desertions from Iraq.

More significant is growing opposition from the center of the country, especially from the military and the Ba'th Party who Saddam relies on for support. In the past two years, there have been numerous reports of attempted coups or plots against the regime, particularly from powerful tribal groups with members in high ranks of the regular army and Republican Guard. Last year, the brutal execution of a dissident general from a powerful Dulaim tribe sparked rebellion in his home town, Ramadi, where provincial officials were killed and public buildings were burned to the ground. This was followed by the forced resignations of two relatives of Saddam, the ministers of interior and defense. The dramatic defection in August 1995 of Husain and Saddam Kamil (with

Northern Security Zone and De Facto Military Demarcation Line



Source: General Accounting Office

their wives, Saddam's daughters), both of whom held key posts in the inner ruling circle, exposed serious cracks in the regime.

Meanwhile the economic situation is deteriorating, disaffecting the

in the near term it is more likely that Saddam will cling to power

hard-hit middle class on which the regime counts for passive support. Maldistribution of wealth is acute, with high salaries and perks such as cars and housing going to Saddam's supporters while middle class workers lose their savings and must take multiple jobs to make ends meet.

However, while sanctions are weakening Saddam's power base, his security system is still intact, making an attempt to remove him highly dangerous and difficult. Aside from popular fear of the regime's ruthless retribu-

tion and the extraordinary task of penetrating the security apparatus, a major constraint lies in the fear of chaos that could follow Saddam's departure. Since the defections, Saddam has undertaken significant political damage control.

He has reduced the power of his immediate family, strengthened ties with the Ba'th Party and the military, and "won" an election for president (he was the only candidate). His ouster is speculative. Although it cannot be ruled out, it cannot be assumed.

Iraq without Sanctions

In the near term it is more likely that Saddam will cling to power, attempting to weaken the alliance arrayed against him to a point where he achieves an easing if not a removal of sanctions. While this process has been delayed, if he continues to accede to

the provisions of resolution 687 on WMD, and UNSCOM issues a satisfactory report, a majority in the Security Council might vote to ease sanctions. Without action to forestall this eventuality, the United States will have to use its veto if it wants the oil embargo maintained.

Since sanctions must be reviewed every two months, continual use of the veto could raise tension with our allies as well as the cost of maintaining alliance cohesion on other issues such as sanctions on Libya and Iran over which there is already disagreement. If the veto is used, more leakage on sanctions could be expected as well as more challenges from Iraq. Alternatively, the United States and its allies could revise the sanctions regime to permit some oil exports to ease the humanitarian crisis, while maintaining a high degree of control over Iraq's expenditure of its oil income. The Security Council passed resolution 986 (which was rejected by Saddam), allowing for a limited amount of oil to be exported over fixed periods with controls on income expenditure. Even if the embargo is eased, other restrictions (such as on imports) could be used to exert control. Given international and especially American distrust of Saddam, full restoration of Iraq's control over its oil is unlikely. A post-sanctions Iraq, even if it came into being, might be only a marginal improvement for the Iraqi people.

Regional Security

The removal of Saddam Hussein has unpredictable implications for the future of the Gulf. Who would succeed him? What support would a new regime have? What agenda would it adopt? The most likely replacement is thought to be someone from the circle of power, either a military man or a Ba'thist. Under this scenario a new regime would have a similar political orientation, the core of which would be a strong, modern Iraq, with the ability to project its power and influence. But such a regime might be only slightly better than the present one. Those who subscribe to this outcome argue that such a regime would be pragmatic. Bankrupt and isolated, it



would be forced to accommodate domestic groups to maintain power and to relax tensions to have sanctions lifted. This would be the most favorable outcome.

Unfortunately, removing the regime in Baghdad would likely be followed by instability. If not curbed, this could be a slippery slope, with the potential for ethnic and sectarian violence and erosion of centralized control. A collapse of the government would allow neighbors such as Iran, Syria, and Turkey to increase their influence over Iraq. Severe instability could spill over into Gulf countries such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, which may have to cope with increased Shia activity from southern Iraq, supported by Iran. Turkey could also face more instability among the Kurds along its borders.

The end result of the second outcome is more predictable but more threatening. If Saddam gets more oil income through a removal or easing of sanctions, his political tenure is more assured. His track record on policy is clear and unlikely to fundamentally change. He will use some of his wealth to buy off domestic discontent, but the lion's share will go to supporters, especially family, and to the security system which will continue to repress the population. The military will be built up slowly but surely, and Saddam's ability to cheat on WMD will grow. He might even get fissile material clandestinely for a nuclear weapon if vigilance is relaxed. He is only 58 and could remain in power for another decade or more.

If sanctions are eased and oil begins to flow, Saddam's behavior may be more difficult to monitor and control. Iraq has oil reserves of well over 100 billion barrels, second only to

Saudi Arabia, with a potential to export 6 million barrels per day. If the growth of Iraqi exports is unchecked, some European and Asian nations will beat a path to its door for trade. Baghdad could be in a position to intimidate and challenge GCC states in a decade. Saddam's survival would present the United States with the task of maintaining a long-term policy of containment and close monitoring of Iraq's WMD.

Force Posture

It is against a potential land threat from Iraq that a robust U.S. force posture is being put in place in the Gulf. The challenge posed by Saddam Hussein in October 1994 illustrated once again the need for swift and decisive deterrent capacity. In the wake of Desert

Iraqi Compliance with U.N. Resolutions

no. 833	★ <i>accept newly demarcated border with Kuwait</i>	♦ <i>accepted</i>
no. 707	★ <i>complete disclosure of all WMD programs</i>	♦ <i>partially fulfilled</i>
no. 687	★ <i>destroy all chemical, biological, and ballistic missiles over 150 kilometers and research/manufacturing facilities</i> ★ <i>not acquire or develop nuclear weapons</i> ★ <i>accept on-site inspection, verification, and monitoring for nuclear, biological, and nuclear missile facilities</i> ★ <i>repatriate Kuwaiti/third country nationals</i> ★ <i>return property stolen from Kuwait</i> ★ <i>end participation in/support for international terrorism</i> ★ <i>establish assurance of "peaceful intentions"</i>	♦ <i>partially fulfilled</i> ♦ <i>nuclear facilities dismantled</i> ♦ <i>inspection system in place/partially functioning</i> ♦ <i>over 600 Kuwaitis still missing</i> ♦ <i>all property not yet returned</i> ♦ <i>unfulfilled</i> ♦ <i>unfulfilled</i>
no. 688	★ <i>end repression of Iraqi citizens/allow access to humanitarian organizations</i>	♦ <i>unfulfilled</i>
no. 705	★ <i>pay compensation up to 30 percent of oil revenues to victims of Kuwaiti occupation</i>	♦ <i>requires lifting oil embargo</i>

Storm, America has unprecedented cooperation with GCC states, including defense agreements with five members and close relations with the sixth, Saudi Arabia. The agreements provide a framework for prepositioning equipment, access to facilities, combined exercises, and an ability to return rapidly in a crisis. In addition to increased air and naval assets, combined exercises

combined exercises enable the United States to rotate combat units through the region

with regional forces enable the United States to rotate Army and Marine combat units through the region periodically without permanent bases.

However, increased security is a burden for GCC states who must bear the expense. Gulf operations in October 1994 may have reached \$1 billion on top of the \$37 billion Gulf states spent on Desert Storm. GCC states no longer have the deep financial pockets they once boasted. Saudi Arabia has one of the world's largest debts, and lavish subsidies to its people are being curtailed. The steep costs of the war have now been exacerbated by the decline of oil prices from highs in the 1970s and 1980s. Defense expenditures, however necessary, are unwelcome. In a region

where radical Islam is spreading anti-Western sentiment, these states also must worry about the visibility of a larger Western military presence.

Meanwhile, it is not only a re-armed Iraq that presents a danger, but Iran as well. The threat from Iran is unlikely to be a ground attack, as it is from Iraq, but naval interdiction in the Gulf and possible use of missiles. Iran has been busy militarizing Abu Musa, an island jointly claimed by Iran and the United

Arab Emirates. Subversion from Iran is a constant threat for GCC countries, some with substantial Shia populations.

Both of these dangers make vigilance essential for the foreseeable future. In the long term, it would be advisable to include Iran and Iraq in a Gulf security framework, which would lessen the need for a large American presence, but given the regimes in these countries, that seems a long way off. The potential for gradual change in Iran appears more likely than in Iraq, although that is also an unknown and in any event will take some time. Unless there is a regime change in Iraq, little long-term behavior change can be expected.

We must be prepared for several scenarios. While a change of regime in Iraq would be preferable, Washington has no international mandate and few instruments to engineer that from outside. Such an outcome must rest with those in Iraq most capable of bringing it about. But the United States can offer an external environment favorable to change. While continuing pressure for compliance with U.N. resolutions, it can hold out prospects for an improved international climate—a gradual end to isolation and easing of sanctions—if a change at the helm in Baghdad gives way to a more acceptable government that adheres to both international norms and respect for its own population. The challenge here will be to help Iraq through a transitional period should a change occur.

If the regime stays in place, the United States and the West will have to devise a policy that contains Saddam Hussein but provides the population with economic relief. Efforts to open up the country and allow contact between its many middle class professionals and the outside world could pay dividends in the long term. It is contact with this segment of the population that will provide the best avenue for producing the alternative leaders to those currently in power.

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